



TITLE:

<Articles>The Kyoto School's Dojo of Philosophy (The 6th International Symposium between the Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University (Japan), and the Institute of Education, University of London (UK))

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CITATION:

Maraldo, John C.. <Articles>The Kyoto School's Dojo of Philosophy (The 6th International Symposium between the Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University (Japan), and the Institute of Education, University of London (UK)). 臨床教育人間学 2015, 13: 41-55

ISSUE DATE:

2015-03-27

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/218057>

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# The Kyoto School's Dōjō of Philosophy

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*During an internet search a year ago I was surprised to learn of a new anthology entitled Education and the Kyoto School of Philosophy. I really should not have been surprised, because after all the Kyoto School philosophers were educators, almost all of them university professors, mostly at Kyoto University. Later in the fall, when I perused titles in the philosophy section of major book stores in Tokyo and Kyoto, I found an abundance of books on Nishida Kitarō and the Kyoto School, ranging from detailed analyses of Nishida's works to political critiques and even a wide-ranging exploration of the Kyoto School and ecology. Given the scope of trends in academic publishing today, one might expect to see topics of this sort treated from various points of view. But the seemingly obvious theme of education was missing among the numerous books in Japanese, and so it is all the more significant that the editors of this anthology in English recognized the relevance of the Kyoto School for education.*

Today we may judge the formal classroom pedagogy of the professors associated with the Kyoto School as rather limited, defined as it was by conventions of one-sided lecturing and listening. There are, however, I think, two features that characterize the educational approach of many Kyoto School philosophers from which we still have much to learn.

## A "SCHOOL" OF KYOTO PHILOSOPHERS

Before elaborating on these two features, however, I want to say a few words about the designation "Kyoto School"—a topic that co-editor Paul Standish takes up in his introduction to the anthology. In our own teaching we often tend to use the name "Kyoto School" as a matter of course. But Standish's Introduction prompted me to think about the reasons this group of philosopher-educators was designated a "school" or *gakuha* 学派 in the first place, perhaps the only such group recognized as such in modern Japanese philosophy. In the early 1900s, the first Japanese chair holder in philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University, Inoue Tetsujirō, grouped Edo-period Confucian thinkers into three "schools" and published books on *The Philosophy of the Japanese Wang Yangming School* (1900), *The Philosophy of the Japanese Ancient Learning School* (1902), and *The Philosophy of the Japanese Zhu Xi School* (1906). Unlike the designation "Kyoto School," Inoue's scheme was a way of retrospectively organizing thinkers who never so grouped themselves together. In the case of the "Kyoto School," the designation works in several ways, both backward in time and forward, and both self-consciously by thinkers aligning themselves with it, and disparagingly by thinkers critical of its thought. The 'Kyoto School' referred first to a past set of thinkers and later to a group with whom some philosophers would consciously identify themselves. And it may include

some critics who became disaffected with Nishida, his followers and protégés. Nishida's former student, Tosaka Jun, apparently used the name for the very first time in 1931 as a criticism of Tanabe Hajime and others who followed Nishida's "bourgeois philosophy"—an ironic criticism since Tanabe himself was perhaps Nishida's more trenchant critic. Standish quotes a remark by Nishitani Keiji, who is inevitably associated with the School and who suggested that the title was a name given by journalists to identify participants in some controversial wartime discussions (commonly known as the *Chūōkōron* discussions of 1941-1942). Yet that usage would seem to include only Nishitani, Kōsaka Masaaki, Kōyama Iwao, and the historian Suzuki Shigetaka who is seldom mentioned as a Kyoto School figure. I mention this history simply to re-confirm that the "Kyoto School" is an ambiguous name that invites careful reflection. Standish's Introduction reflects further on six characteristics that I used previously to typify the group. *Education and the Kyoto School of Philosophy* prompted me to reconsider the way that such a group of thinkers can be identified. Aside from the historical and philosophical similarities they shared in the manner that Wittgenstein called a "family resemblance," one might also ask about the pedagogical practices they commonly employed.

## THE QUESTION OF EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

What were these philosophers doing *as educators*? What characterized their teaching activities? I think we can notice two features that distinguished their manner and methods of teaching. First, aside from their activity as professors in the classroom, they practiced another, more informal and traditional style of teaching and learning: the personal, one-on-one exchange that occurred in small groups or in encounters with individual students, often in the professor's home but also through personal correspondence. This kind of training resembled the sort of apprenticeship still used in the practice of traditional Japanese arts and crafts known as the "ways," the way of calligraphy, of tea ceremony, or of flower arrangement, for example, as well as the ways of various martial arts. The comparison, however, comes with a caveat: whereas these various "ways" often encourage a close relationship between "master" and disciple" within a particular lineage or school, it must be noted that Nishida did not function as an "iemoto" or headmaster of a school, and we best avoid describing his students and younger colleagues as "deshi" or disciples. Nishida was indeed a pathfinder, but those who came after him did not follow uncritically. They practiced a way of questioning and of deeply probing the kinds of questions they learned from Nishida and from his forerunners in Japan and sources in the West. Some, like Miki Kiyoshi and Tosaka Jun, were more critical of "Nishida philosophy" than others; some, like Nishitani Keiji, transformed it more creatively, and younger colleagues like Tanabe Hajime questioned it in a way that promoted Nishida to transform his own thought. Yet most of these teachers, it seems to me, practiced a kind of education outside the classroom, outside the walls of academic institutions, in a different kind of space: the space of informal dialogue and one-on-one training. I would like to call this forum the *dōjō* of philosophy.

The Kyoto School's *dōjō* of philosophy took place in personal correspondence as well as in the homes and meeting rooms of its teachers and students. As in the *dōjōs* of the martial arts, those venues were occasions for probing problems together and challenging one another as well as imitating the teacher. Although this kind of forum is by no means restricted to the thinkers

in Japan who are associated with the Kyoto School, I think it is characteristic of enough of them, and sufficiently crucial to the way of thinking they share, to consider their dōjō of philosophy as an identifying factor of the School.

A second distinguishing feature we can identify in the Kyoto School's practice of education concerns an interest shared by its most influential "members." Many writers have pointed out that Kyoto School thinkers drew from East Asian as well as Western philosophical sources to create their own philosophies, but I think that this identifying feature needs further definition. Earlier philosophy professors in the mid Meiji era such as Inoue Tetsujirō and Inoue Enryō had constructed their own syncretic philosophies drawing from Asian as well as European sources. They implicitly accepted the idea of philosophy as a universal discourse, but they did so by helping create philosophical language in Japan, often through the trail and error, inventing new terms both to translate and to supplement Western philosophical language. Tetsujirō cast Japanese Confucians as philosophers, grouping them into "schools" as I mentioned earlier, and Enryō re-fashioned Buddhist thought into philosophy and wrote of the "philosophy of Dōgen" and "the philosophy of Shinran." Both Inoues recognized Asian traditions as sources of and resources for "pure [or theoretical] philosophy" (*junsei tetsugaku* 純正哲学), in distinction from many scholars and philosophy professors earlier in the Meiji-era who were ready to discard Japanese and Asian intellectual traditions.

Yet these predecessors of Nishida and Kyoto School philosophers seemed to share a prejudice of the scholars before them who had first introduced Japan to Western philosophy and political thought. Kuzawa Yukichi, Nishimura Shigeki, Nishi Amane, Katō Hiroyuki and other "Enlightenment" (*keimō* 啓蒙) thinkers absorbed Western learning critically and continued the transformation of the Japanese language begun by Dutch Studies, so that Japan could partake in the allegedly universal discourse of philosophy. But it seems that the Enlightenment and later Meiji-era philosophers, including the two Inoues, paid little if any attention to Japanese artistic achievements and aesthetic traditions. (There are admittedly a few exceptions among the philosophically trained scholars, aside from writers like Mori Ōgai and Okakura Tenshin. Nishi Amane barely touched on Japanese artistic examples in his theoretical treatises that introduced the field of aesthetics, but Miyake Setsurei expounded on the Japanese sense of beauty, and Takayama Chogyū closely examined some traditions of Japanese painting.)

In contrast, attention to traditional Japanese arts and literature has been a practice common to most major Kyoto School philosophers. Nishida more abstractly, Nishitani and Ueda Shizuteru more concretely, and recently Ōhashi Ryosuke, have been at the vanguard of this incorporation of insights from the practices of Japanese arts and literature. Were it not for the commonplace disregard of Japanese artistic and intellectual traditions among professional philosophers in Japan, this feature might seem another bit of evidence of Japan-centrism or acceptance of some supposed Japanese difference advocated by *nihonjinron* literature. But Kyoto School philosophers did not attend to Japanese artistic practices to point out a supposedly superior feature of their native traditions. They drew inspiration and insight from Japanese and Asian arts and literature in pursuit of a deeper and more comprehensive vision of truth. Their attention to artistic practices, moreover, has not been limited to Japanese traditions. Nishida finds examples of his theories in Michelangelo's sculpture, Goethe's poems,

and Max Klinger's line drawings, and he sees enactive intuition (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為的直観) at work in western artists as well as in traditional Japanese "ways." Nishitani and Ueda draw upon Goethe and Rilke as well as Saigyō and Bashō to illustrate insights, and through the concept of the aesthetic "cut" (*kire* 切れ), Ōhashi has placed Japanese artistic practices in the context of the entire contemporary world.

In their attention to artistic traditions and practices, these Kyoto School philosophers share an interest displayed by a few American philosophers like John Dewey and Stanley Cavell, who in turn are sources of several reflections in *Education and the Kyoto School of Philosophy*. The work of these philosophers serves as a reminder to us of the pedagogical value of reflecting on and learning to perform visual and literary arts. As far as I know, the Kyoto School thinkers do not thematize the apprenticeship-style of education practiced in traditional Japanese arts and "ways"—including Bashō's way of training his haiku students—but the parallel in their own pedagogical practices can only highlight their thematic attention to the arts. In their one-on-one dialogues and correspondence, they were doing something also done by the artists and writers who inspired their reflections.

The present era of mass education and "distance learning" via the internet seems to pose a nearly insurmountable challenge to the style of education practiced in Kyoto-School dōjōs of philosophy, particularly when learning is equated with the transference of information and small seminars are deemed an extravagant luxury. We are pressed to find a way to sustain the practice of education on a personal level, and to ensure that students can embody valued knowledge and skills. In some areas more than others—the teaching and learning of foreign languages, for example, or of music and studio arts—we may still value personal interaction over mass dissemination, and these areas may serve as models of instruction for other disciplines such as the philosophy of education. I do not know how to convey on a mass scale the learning that takes place in small seminars, but I do know that this learning need not be confined to actual or virtual classrooms. Dōjōs where thinking is practiced by people actually present to one another can take place in pubs and coffee houses and in group meetings both formal and informal. But then educators, administrators and legislators must learn to provide resources for small-scale, interpersonal learning and to provide opportunities for it to occur wherever it can. I am gratified that the conference that occasioned these remarks took place not via video but in the presence of its participants where a lively interchange could occur. For education to remain enlivening as well as relevant, I think it will also need to take place beyond institutional classroom boundaries, both actual and virtual, and be practiced as an art that guides decision-making in our daily lives.

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